

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-05 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 IO-10 OMB-01 ACDA-05 SAM-01 SAJ-01 NIC-01

EB-07 AID-05 SAB-01 /085 W

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R 051230Z DEC 74

FM AMEMBASSY JIDDA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9479

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY MANAMA

AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY MUSCAT

AMCONSUL DHAHRAN

COMIDEASTFOR

S E C R E T JIDDA 7161

KUWAIT PASS DOHA; BEIRUT PASS BAGHDAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, XF, SA

SUBJECT: PRINCE SULTAN'S PRESS CONFERENCE IN THE EASTERN PROVINCE

SUMMARY. AT A PRESS CONFERENCE IN THE EASTERN PROVINCE ON DECEMBER 3 MINISTER OF DEFENSE PRINCE SULTAN SPOKE WITH UNCOMMON ASSURANCE ON A BROAD RANGE OF FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES, PARTICULARLY IN REGARD TO THE PERSIAN GULF. OF A SPECIAL INTEREST WERE HIS COMMENTS ON FOREIGN NAVAL ACTIVITY IN THE GULF, MOVEMENT TOWARD GREATER UNITY OF THE RIPARIAN ARAB STATES, THE SECURITY OF THE GULF (INCLUDING A SPECIFIC DENIAL THAT THERE IS ANY NEED TO FEAR IRANIAN
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AGGRESSION), AN IRAQI INITIATIVE TOWARD BETTER RELATIONS, AND ON

RECENT ARMS ACQUISITIONS. END SUMMARY.

1. THE EMBASSY WISHES TO BRING TO THE ATTENTION OF ADDRESSEES THE PRESS CONFERENCE GIVEN BY PRINCE SULTAN BIN ABD AL AZIZ, MINISTER OF DEFENSE AND AVIATION, ON DECEMBER 3. (FBIS LONDON L040123). SAUDI PRESS AND OFFICIALS ARE PORTRAYING THE SPEECH AS A MAJOR FOREIGN POLICY STATEMENT AND WE AGREE THAT IT IS SIGNIFICANT. ABOUT A YEAR AGO ON A VISIT TO THE EASTERN PROVINCE SULTAN ALSO MADE WHAT WAS BILLED AS A MAJOR STATEMENT OF SAUDI POLICY TOWARD THE GULF. WE FIND THIS YEAR'S EFFORT MORE INTERESTING.

2. ASIDE FROM THE DETAILS, WE ARE STRUCK BY THE CONFIDENCE WITH WHICH SULTAN SPOKE OUT ON A BROAD RANGE OF FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES. (SULTAN IS ONE OF THOSE WITH AN EYE ON THE POSITION OF FOREIGN MINISTER). NOT ONLY DID SULTAN SPEAK WITH PERSONAL ASSURANCE BUT HE WAS EXPRESSING A RELATIVELY NEW AND GROWING CONFIDENCE OF THE SAG THAT IT HAS THE RIGHT AND DUTY TO TAKE THE LEAD IN SPEAKING OF MATTERS WHICH AFFECT ANY ARAB STATE OF THE PERSIAN GULF.

3. THE FOLLOWING ARE SOME OF THE POINTS WE FOUND OF PARTICULAR INTEREST:

A. FOREIGN NAVAL ACTIVITY OFF ARAB COASTS. RESPONDING TO A QUESTION ABOUT RECENT US FLEET MOVEMENTS IN THE PERSIAN GULF SULTAN RESPONDED IN A MANNER WHICH REFLECTED A GENERAL DISTASTE FOR THE PRESENCE OF FOREIGN NAVAL UNITS NEAR ANY ARAB STATE. HE SAID THAT THE ENTIRE ARAB NATION MUST BE UNANIMOUS IN NOT GIVING OTHER THAN TRANSIT AND VISIT FACILITIES. THOUGH THE QUESTION WAS AIMED AT THE US, THE ANSWER WAS GENERAL AND IN FACT DIFFUSED THE REFERENCE TO THE US. WHEN TALKING OF FACILITIES,

FOR INSTANCE, HE MIGHT HAVE BEEN TALKING OF THOSE GIVEN TO THE SOVIETS BY THE IRAQIS. HE MIGHT ALSO HAVE BEEN REFERRING TO COMIDEASTFOR. (THE RULER OF BAHRAIN WAS STILL IN THE COUNTRY AT THE TIME OF THE PRESS CONFERENCE.)

B. UNITY OF ARAB GULF STATES. SULTAN'S ADVOCACY OF CLOSER ASSOCIATION BETWEEN BAHRAIN, QATAR AND THE UAR REITERATES A THEME WE HAVE HEARD HIM MAKE IN PRIVATE. HE SEES SAUDI ARABIA AND
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HIMSELF PERSONALLY AS HAVING A ROLE TO PLAY IN BRINGING ABOUT GREATER GULF UNITY AND HE ALSO FORSEES SOME FORM OF SAUDI ASSOCIATION WITH IT. THE PRESENCE OF OTHER GULF RULERS IN THE COUNTRY AT THE TIME HE SPOKE APPEARS TO GIVE THEIR SANCTION TO SAUDI ARABIA'S TAKING THE LEAD.

C. GULF SECURITY. A QUESTION ABOUT A "POWER VACUUM" IN THE GULF AFTER THE DEPARTURE OF THE BRITISH MIGHT HAVE BEEN PLANTED IN THE

WAY IT LED SULTAN TO ONE OF HIS MOST CONSISTENT THEMES.

"THERE IS NO VACUUM WHICH NEEDS TO BE FILLED," HE REPEATED SEVERAL TIMES. HE HAS SAID THIS BEFORE AS A WAY OF DENYING THAT IRAN HAS ANY SPECIAL SECURITY ROLE TO PLAY ON THE ARAB SIDE OF THE GULF. THIS TIME HE WENT FURTHER AND DIRECTLY FACED THE QUESTION OF WHETHER THE ARAB STATES SHOULD FEAR AGGRESSION FROM IRAN. HIS ANSWER WAS A FIRM "NO." AT THE SAME TIME, BY RAISING THE QUESTION OF IRANIAN "AGGRESSION," HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT IT HAD BECOME A QUESTION OF SOME CONCERN IN THE ARAB GULF STATES.

D. RELATIONS WITH IRAQ. WHEN ASKED ABOUT THE PRESENCE AT SAUDI MANEUVERS OF THE IRAQI VICE CHIEF OF STAFF, SULTAN'S COMMENTS ACKNOWLEDGED AN IRAQI INITIATIVE TOWARD IMPROVING RELATIONS AND A POSITIVE SAUDI RESPONSE. WE WOULD NOT WANT TO GIVE TOO MUCH SIGNIFICANCE TO THIS EXCHANGE BUT IT WAS CLEARLY AN INVITATION FOR FURTHER GESTURES FROM IRAQ.

E. ARMS. SULTAN CONFIRMED A BILLION DOLLAR ARMS DEAL WITH THE FRENCH FOR ARMOR AND MISSILES. (DATT IS REPORTING SEPARATELY INFORMATION THAT THE MISSILE SYSTEM INVOLVED IS THE CROTALE). SULTAN ALSO SPOKE HIGHLY OF THE SAG'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE US IN THE ARMS AREA, NOTING ASSURANCES THAT THE US WILL PROVIDE ANYTHING WHICH THEY FEEL THEY ARE CAPABLE OF ABSORBING.

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